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AUTHOR Corcoran, Ellen
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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the specific areas of stress for graduate interns in programs that require a year-long internship as part of a post-baccalaureate course of study prior to certification. The focus is upon three categories of stress that contain issues and concerns which speak directly to questions about the impact of a program with a longer period of practice teaching and a completed undergraduate degree as one of its requirements for admission. Data from the study were gathered through weekly seminars in which the interns voiced their concerns. The following areas of stress were identified: (1) interns experience the stress of economic hardship because they are paying tuition and are delaying their entry into the work force; (2) interns and their supervisors experience the stress of conflicting perceptions of how much competence is adequate for a beginning teachers; and (3) interns and their cooperating teachers experience the stress of working together in roles and relationships for which there are few models or prescriptions. Suggestions are made for responding to these and other stress factors that may reduce stress for interns and their supervisors. (JD)

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CRITICAL ISSUES FOR INTERN TEACHERS DURING THE CLINICAL EXPERIENCE

Ellen Corcoran

Associate Professor of Education

University of New Hampshire

Durham, NH 03824

(603) 862-2374

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CRITICAL ISSUES FOR INTERN TEACHERS DURING THE CLINICAL EXPERIENCE

There have been many calls for reform in teacher education from commissions in both the public and private sectors. Several of the commission reports urge teacher educators to extend the time allotted for practice teaching from one semester to a year. These same reports also urge that the year-long practice teaching experience be undertaken as part of a post baccalaureate course of study rather than as part of an undergraduate education major. What underlies these proposed reforms is the belief that learning to teach is an important and complex process, one which requires strong undergraduate preparation and extended time. (See, for example, the 1986 reports of the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy and The Holmes Group.)

Although the response to these proposals has been mixed, a number of colleges, universities and state legislatures have instituted reforms which extend the period required for practice teaching and which include successful completion of an undergraduate degree as part of the admissions requirements to programs leading to teacher certification. The net effect of these two reforms is that it will take more time, resources and commitment to become a fully certified teacher.

These changes present challenges and also create opportunities for teacher educators. One challenge created by these changes which is of particular interest to the present author is the stress among interns and their supervisors created by the shift in the organizational patterns within teacher education programs. When a teacher education program requires an undergraduate degree for admission, and when the period for practice teaching is extended to a full year, that program can be said to

be running counter to the prevailing norms for teacher education programs. Many of the organizational conditions of a post graduate, extended teacher education program differ from those of a traditional undergraduate program with a single semester of student teaching. It is one thing to envision reforms to improve the quality of teacher education and it is quite another thing to learn to help those directly affected by those reforms to cope with the distress of organizational change. The purposes of the present study are to:

-- Identify stress factors created by reforms in one teacher education program.

-- Discuss the organizational responses developed by that program to reduce stress for interns and their supervisors.

The areas of stress which are particularly relevant to the present study include:

-- The lack of financial resources on the part of some interns to meet the costs of tuition and living expenses necessitated by the additional year of the extended program.

-- Ambiguity in role definition and expectations for interns relative to those for beginning teachers from traditional teacher education programs.

-- Uncertain support and direction from cooperating teachers stemming from lack of experience in working with graduate students for a full year.

These areas of stress are of special interest to the author because each of them, if left unresolved, has the potential to deflect the intern from

concentrating on the process of learning to teach, thereby reducing the intended value of the reforms.

Background for the Present Study

Although many of the reforms calling for an extended period of practice teaching and the prerequisite of an undergraduate degree for admission to programs leading to teacher certification emerged during the 1980s, the ideas underlying these reforms are not new. During the 1960s, for example, there was a move toward programs which offered a Master of Arts in Teaching to academically talented and highly motivated college graduates. Many of these programs were associated with prestigious liberal arts colleges. When the job market for teachers became tight, most of these programs were forced to close.

In 1973, however, the University of New Hampshire moved from offering a range of undergraduate teaching majors to a graduate teacher education program with a full-year internship. Part of the motivation for this move was a response to the declining job market. Developers of the program believed that it was appropriate to reduce the numbers of teachers certified each year while, at the same time, raising its standards for admissions and requirements for certification.

Because the University of New Hampshire moved to a post-graduate certification and master's program which includes a year-long internship 15 years ago, we have accumulated a broad range of information which speaks to some of the questions implicit in the more recent calls for reform which are currently being implemented or considered by colleges, universities and state legislatures. As indicated previously, this

author is particularly interested in the stressful impacts of these reforms on interns and their supervisors.

Design of the Present Study

There have been several articles describing the overall curriculum of the University of New Hampshire's Teacher Education Program (Andrew, 1981; Andrew, 1986; Corcoran & Andrew, 1988). Data for the present study were collected during the internship phase of the program of the 1987-88 academic year. Before continuing on with a discussion of the present study, a brief description of the internship is in order.

For the internship, teacher education students spend a full academic year working with an experienced master teacher in a local school. The internship is a full-time commitment, although some interns take evening courses at the same time. The internship is counted for six credits each semester. Approximately a third of the interns receive financial support in the form of tuition scholarships, grants and stipends. A quarter of the interns are nontraditional students; some are starting a new profession, others are reentering the work force after taking time out for childcare.

Each intern is assigned to a university supervisor and a seminar group typically consisting of six interns. The university supervisors are either full-time faculty, experienced teachers working part-time or experienced teachers with graduate assistantships. The university supervisors work with each intern and his or her cooperating teacher in the intern's classroom an average of every other week or six times a semester. In addition, the university supervisors meet as a group every

two to three weeks to discuss common problems in supervision and to clarify and refine program policy regarding the internship.

Seminar groups are arranged according to grade level, subject matter and location of the internship school. Six interns share the same university supervisor who serves as the seminar leader. Each seminar meets for two hours each week. The seminar is intended to fulfill two principal functions: a forum for interns to share their experiences and a study group where focused discussion, reading and writing are used to explore a broad range of educational issues.

During the 1987-88 Academic Year, there were 17 seminar leaders, all of whom agreed to keep track of issues raised by the interns during each of their weekly seminars. The seminar leaders wanted to know whether there were issues and concerns raised by interns which cut across all seminar groups. They also wanted to know whether the interns' issues and concerns occurred in any kind of common sequence, regardless of seminar group or leader. Although all of the seminar leaders were committed to encouraging the interns to use the seminar as a forum for exploring questions that came up during their work in the schools, the seminar leaders also believed that answers to questions about common issues and concerns would be helpful for orienting new seminar leaders and for long-range curriculum development.

The seminar leaders agreed on a narrative format for collecting the information. Because all seminar leaders were experienced classroom observers, they were proficient in a technique called "selective verbatim," which enabled them to keep an accurate, running record of what was discussed in seminar. (See Acheson and Gall, 1987, pp. 81-96 for a

full description of "selective verbatim.") In addition to the written narrative, each seminar leader included his or her name, the date and the amount of time spent on each topic on each write up.

The author, who was Director of Field Experiences at the time, agreed to coordinate and monitor the data collection process. She also agreed to feed the findings back to the seminar leaders as a group on a regular basis. Whenever the notes for a specific seminar were unclear, the author was able to consult with the seminar leader for clarification.

During the summer of 1988, with the support of a grant from the College of Liberal Arts, the author completed analysis of the data. The first step in the process was to sift through all of the topics mentioned for a specific week. By comparing and contrasting all of the topics, the author was able to form categories of concern for each week. After the categories for each week were formed, sifting and sorting occurred a second time to create a second group of general categories for each semester. At no time was any topic eliminated, although it was sometimes possible to merge and collapse topics into one another. When the process of analysis was complete, there were six categories of concern which contained all topics raised by interns during the seminars (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973).

The six categories are rich in ideas for further research, both qualitative and quantitative. Before moving on to an in-depth discussion of a few of the more interesting topics, a summary of the six categories of concern is appropriate.

Summary of the Categories

The six categories of concern about which all groups of interns raised questions or shared information on a week by week basis were: (1) Planning and Instruction, (2) Management and Discipline, (3) School and Community Context, (4) Personal Concerns, (5) Internship and (6) The Cooperating Teacher. Of these, the first three are standard topics in most teacher education curricula. Within the curriculum of the University of New Hampshire, for example, the first three topics form the basis for a number of elective courses and they are included in the text recommended as a resource for interns.

Because the first three categories do not contain issues and concerns which differ from those generally accepted as typical for all teacher education students, regardless of the type of program in which they are enrolled, the author has chosen not to discuss them here. The final three categories, however, contain issues and concerns which speak directly to questions about the impact of a program with a longer period of practice teaching and a completed undergraduate degree as one of its requirements for admission. Items from each of these categories, Personal Concerns, The Internship and The Cooperating Teacher, form the basis for the discussion which follows.

Personal Concerns

During their seminars, interns brought up many issues which fit the category of personal concerns. Personal concerns include questions about living arrangements, finances, second jobs, time, health, friends and family.

One personal concern with which many interns struggled was the cost of the additional year of the extended program which they had chosen.

Although they indicated that they fully understood what they were getting into when they chose to enroll in the extended program at the University of New Hampshire, they did not realize how stressful the economic pressures of paying for tuition and meeting cost of living expenses would be. In a few instances, the stress created by economic pressures was great enough to set up strong resistance on the part of individual interns.

For these interns, it became increasingly difficult to focus on the overall purpose of why they were there, to learn to teach, because they were caught up in trying to figure out how to alleviate the economic pressures they were experiencing. They frequently became involved in struggles with their university supervisor over shortening the time spent at their internship schools so that they could take on a second or third part-time job. They argued that they couldn't afford the second semester of internship.

In other words, the economic pressures created by the organizational shift to an extended, post-baccalaureate certification program was a source of distress for some interns. As they saw it, they did not have the financial resources to meet the demands of the program. They became angry, resistant, frustrated and exhausted. For a few, the stress was so great as to overshadow the intended benefits of the organizational shift. Despite the fact that they wanted to be associated with the program because of the high quality of its students and the unusually high percentage of graduates employed by school systems of their choice, these few interns resented having to bear the costs of paying tuition and of not earning a living wage as a result of being part of the program.

Although every attempt was and is being made to secure grants, scholarships and stipends for interns, there is not enough to go around. This is not a problem which is limited to the University of New Hampshire, although the problem is exacerbated by the exceptionally low level of support for education from the state legislature.

Although the number of interns for whom economic pressure becomes a severe problem is very small, it does create a more broadly based level of tension throughout the seminar groups. There is no quick and ready answer that the seminar leader can use to dispell the problem or the feelings that go with it, other than to try to assist the intern in locating sources of financial support.

Perhaps at the heart of this economic concern is the question of how the reformers who would extend and upgrade teacher education are going to pay for it. Our experience at the University of New Hampshire suggests that the necessary support is not forthcoming at either the federal or state level. A few local school systems are seeing the value of investing in teacher education through offering stipends to interns, but in the majority of cases it is the intern who is bearing the cost of reform.

The Internship

As was the case with personal concerns, there were questions and issues about internship policies and requirements which were raised by interns in all seminar groups. A critical issue which arose for some interns, particularly during the second semester, was the question of the need for a full year internship. In this case, it was not economic hardship which was at the heart of the issue. Here the impetus was the

question of role definition and expectations. If an intern was doing well, and was seen as competent by his or her university supervisor, cooperating teacher and the administrators at his or her internship school, then why was the intern required to complete the second semester in the status of an intern?

There are two primary reasons for this ambiguity in the role definition and expectations for interns, each of which is related to the fact that the program is running counter to prevailing norms.

-- Although the interns are graduate students who are learning to teach, some are eager to function as full-time teachers at the end of first semester or part way through second semester.

-- Because the interns are being evaluated by several people, they receive mixed messages about how good is good enough. Good enough to be hired in a school system may not correspond with earning an A for the second semester of internship.

When these ambiguities are not resolved, the intern experiences frustration and confusion. He or she begins to resent the constraints and requirements imposed by the internship.

There are several responses we have identified to help the supervisor when a successful intern begins to question the value of continuing on in the internship. These responses allow the intern to clarify his or her purposes and to appreciate the differences between being a beginning teacher and an intern. The two examples below are possible because an intern has a lighter teaching load than a beginning teacher.

-- One response is to encourage the intern to visit and work with master teachers in schools other than his or her internship school so that the intern can continue to refine and enlarge his or her approach to teaching.

-- A second response is to assist the intern in researching and developing new ways of planning and teaching his or her own units. This may include dealing with mandated content in original ways or it may include teaching new content using different organizational patterns.

For most interns, these responses provide new and higher expectations of what teaching can be. This tends to relieve the feelings of frustration and confusion and to inspire the interns to take advantage of the flexible time and professional resources available to them as interns.

Another response to the stress created by running counter to prevailing norms occurs on a programmatic level. We now anticipate the possibility of frustration and confusion due to role ambiguity and conflicting expectations. We have become more skilled at describing the program to interested applicants, pointing out that if an applicant is in a hurry to enter the job market, there are other programs available. We have also become more skilled at reading applications, making sure that we interview applicants who do not seem to understand the full implications of a year-long internship requirement.

In the past, we inadvertently responded to interns who have questioned the value of a full year internship in ways that increased stress. For example, in our desire to be responsive to interns' needs, we have experimented with various policies which would permit interns to

petition out of the second semester of internship on the basis of demonstrated competence. In our desire to be flexible, we sent out mixed messages which increased the ambiguity about expectations. This lack of clarity allowed interns to form expectations which led to conflict with their supervisors over whether they had fulfilled the requirements of the program.

-- Some interns entered the program with experience as substitute teachers or with certification from an unapproved program. They wanted to waive some or all of the internship requirement.

-- Some interns with little or no prior experience entered the program convinced that they could accomplish two semesters' work in one. They spent so much time trying to complete the requirements at twice the normal rate that they had no time to learn about teaching from reflecting on their own experiences.

As a result of the stress caused by unclear expectations about the length of internship, we have developed a firm and consistent policy. The only interns who can petition for an exemption from the second semester of internship are those who are already certified through an approved program and who can provide evidence of successful teaching experience. For all other interns there is a full year internship.

These and similar responses to questions about internship policies and requirements have enabled us to clarify the role definitions and expectations for interns. Although we have, as a result, lost some of our flexibility in working on an individual basis with each intern, we believe that the overall stress level stemming from the confusion of mixed messages about how our program differs from the traditional four

year undergraduate program with a semester of student teaching has decreased.

The Cooperating Teacher

The third category of concern which was raised in all seminar groups was the cooperating teacher. Included within this category were questions about how much responsibility the intern should assume in the classroom, how much time the cooperating teacher should spend observing and conferencing with the intern, learning to resolve conflicts between the cooperating teacher and the intern.

One of the consequences of a program which relies on a full year internship and which works with graduate students is that very few of our cooperating teachers have had the experience of a full year internship themselves. Nor were they graduate students when they were working toward certification. For cooperating teachers who have not had the experience of a full year internship and who have not worked with graduate students, it is difficult to envision the scope and sequence of what the year is going to be like. There are several troublesome questions which arise for interns and cooperating teachers alike.

One question which arises quite early in the internship concerns how much direction the intern needs from the cooperating teacher in basic teaching skills such as planning, instruction or management. Because the intern is a graduate student, there is a tendency for the cooperating teacher to stand back and to assume that the intern knows how to plan, teach and manage. At the same time, there is also a reluctance on the part of the intern to ask for help in the basics. When the cooperating teacher gives the intern a lot of responsibility without enough support,

direction, and positive feedback, the potential for stress is great. The intern can get off to a poor start in the classroom. The relationship between the cooperating teacher and the intern can become awkward and strained. The intern can become discouraged and frustrated before he or she has been able to develop enough self-confidence to withstand the times when things do not go smoothly.

Another question which arises concerns the kind of direction an intern is likely to need. As graduate students committed to a full year internship, our interns have strong subject matter backgrounds. Cooperating teachers sometimes assume that having a strong subject matter background means that an intern is going to have a clear sense of how to present material in ways that motivate and challenge his or her students. Yet interns find it difficult to know what to teach when, despite the fact that they are well grounded in the overall content matter. Some interns require assistance in learning how to take what they have learned as undergraduates and turn that knowledge into lessons and units appropriate to the age and ability levels of their students. A methods course by itself is not usually enough to help an intern move from knowing something to being able to teach it.

A third question which arises concerns the amount of thinking about teaching that the interns have done prior to making the commitment to a graduate program and a full year internship. Most interns go about the decision-making process carefully, discussing teaching and alternative programs with family, former teachers and university faculty. A result of this kind of exploration is that many interns begin their internships with clearly thought out approaches to teaching which they can articulate

to their cooperating teachers and supervisors. Sometimes this results in cooperating teachers and supervisors assuming that the intern knows more and is more self-confident than is actually the case. When this happens, the cooperating teacher can go along for weeks thinking that everything is just fine and the intern can go along for the same amount of time feeling trapped by the impression of competence and confidence that he or she has created.

In almost all cases, these and similar sources of stress between the cooperating teacher and the intern are worked out. Sometimes it is the university supervisor who is able to identify where the trouble lies and to help the cooperating teacher get a clearer sense of the intern's needs. Sometimes there are other cooperating teachers in the building who can help the cooperating teacher get a clearer understanding of where interns are most likely to need direction. At other times the cooperating teacher and the intern have the skills to pinpoint where things do not seem to be working out and to identify ways of resolving the areas of stress.

On a more general level, the program is also able to help new and prospective cooperating teachers gain a clearer sense of the implications of working with a graduate student intern for a full academic year.

-- Workshops and orientations now speak directly to some of these questions, helping cooperating teachers avoid problems before they occur.

-- Handouts about specific areas which are known to be stressful provide the cooperating teacher and the intern with a common focus for discussion.

-- Courses in supervision which are specifically designed for cooperating teachers are offered on a regular basis.

-- Placing interns in clusters at schools where there is a core of experienced cooperating teachers provides new or less experienced cooperating teachers with a built-in support system.

Over time, the organization has learned to respond to the stress in the relationship between the intern and the cooperating teacher in ways that reduce the stress and minimize the effects of having graduate students work as interns for a full year.

Summary and Implications

As discussed in the previous sections, there are hidden effects in the reform movements calling for teacher education programs with extended practice teaching time and successful completion of an undergraduate degree as part of the admissions requirement. The impact of these hidden effects is to place stress on interns and their supervisors. To summarize:

-- Interns experience the stress of economic hardship because they are paying tuition and are delaying their entry into the work force.

-- Interns and their supervisors experience the stress of conflicting perceptions of how much competence is adequate for a beginning teacher.

-- Interns and their cooperating teachers experience the stress of working together in roles and relationships for which there are few models or prescriptions.

Although it is difficult to reduce some stress factors created by reforms, our experience at the University of New Hampshire indicates that it is possible to respond to other stress factors in ways that reduce stress for interns and their supervisors. To summarize:

-- As of this writing, it has not been possible to reduce the stress of economic hardship to the point where all interns have funding for tuition and cost of living expenses.

-- It is possible to reduce the stress of conflicting expectations for interns by developing firm and consistent policies which clearly state the length of the internship and the differences between the internship program and traditional student teaching programs.

-- It is possible to reduce the frustration and impatience experienced by some interns during the latter portions of their internship by providing well structured options for further study in curriculum development and related disciplines.

-- It is possible to reduce the stress of uncertain direction and support from cooperating teachers lacking the experience of working with graduate students for a full year by:
(a) developing workshops, courses and materials which speak directly to the questions and concerns raised by inexperienced cooperating teachers; (b) placing several interns at the same school so that experienced cooperating teachers can help to orient inexperienced cooperating teachers; and (c) assisting university supervisors so that they are able to orient inexperienced cooperating teachers in a timely fashion.

As indicated at the outset of this study, there have been many calls for reform in teacher education. In many ways, the program at the University of New Hampshire provides a model of what these reforms look like in action. Our experience has shown us that there are many areas of stress for interns and their supervisors created when a program begins to run counter to prevailing norms. Our experience has also shown us that there are organizational responses that we have made which reduced the level of stress for interns and their supervisors. As we continue to examine our program and the responses of our interns and supervisors to it, we find that we are able to reduce the mismatch between what the interns and their supervisors expect and what they actually experience. As the mismatch decreases, the closer we are able to come to achieving the program's original goals.

The potential value of our experience for others lies in several areas. First, it may be that the specific areas of stress discussed in the present study apply to other programs making the shift to a year-long internship as part of a post baccalaureate course of study. Second, it may be that the organizational responses discussed in the present study prove helpful to other programs in similar situations. And third, on a more general level, it may be that the present study represents a case study to inform policy makers and reformers about stress associated with the dynamics of change in teacher education. In the last analysis, our experience at the University of New Hampshire has shown us that it is possible to change in ways which are sensitive to interns and their supervisors and which continue to improve the quality of our teacher education program.

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